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SUBJECT: FINLAND: PLANS FOR UPCOMING EU TALKS ON UNCHR REFORM

1. (SBU) Poloffs on Oct. 3 spoke with MFA Director for Human Rights Johanna Suurpaa and other Finnish officials about Finland's and the EU's next steps on UNCHR reform. Finland will be EU President beginning in July 2006, and the GoF hopes that negotiations on UNCHR reform can be concluded in time to allow the new Council to meet during its Presidency. Accordingly, Finland plans to take an active role both in EU discussions on a common position (beginning Oct. 5 in Brussels) as well as the subsequent negotiations in New York. Suurpaa said that she hopes Finland and the U.S. can work closely in the coming weeks on the issue.

2. (SBU) According to Suurpaa, there is broad agreement within the EU on the general nature of the proposed UN Council on Human Rights. In addition, it appears that most of these goals track closely with U.S. priorities. Finland supports making UN Human Rights Council membership contingent on a two-thirds vote. The GoF agrees that the new Council should be a standing body, although the exact frequency of scheduled sessions was less important. A May ministerial meeting that provided NGOs an opportunity to interact with the Council would be desirable. Augmenting the current strength of the CHR and not "sliding back" is also a "non-negotiable" point, and Suurpaa emphasized that the EU and U.S. must work together to scuttle efforts by certain countries to press for a Council that is actually weaker than the current CHR. The GoF would like to see the new Council have greater ability to address urgent human rights abuses and emerging crises, such as through a direct referral mechanism to the Security Council. Suurpaa repeatedly emphasized that the "timetable" issue was very important to the GoF and suggested the GoF (and possible the EU?) would be willing to leave certain details to future debate in order to get the new Council up and running by the fall of 2006.

3. (SBU) Finland agrees with the U.S. positions on peer review and Third Committee relations, but views these issues as less important than those cited above. Suurpaa said that there was no reason to even discuss the Third Committee issue at this point. The one area of partial disagreement with the U.S. is over the new Council's size. The GoF would like to see a Council of more than 30 since Finland's membership opportunities (as a small country) would be more limited with a smaller body. However, the GoF views the size issue as negotiable and, again, of less importance.

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